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# A contra leader quits, in setback to White House

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MIAMI — Nicaraguan rebel leader Arturo Cruz yesterday announced his resignation from the contras' political arm, an action seen as a setback to the Reagan administration's policy toward Nicaragua.

In a resignation statement addressed to "my fellow countrymen," Cruz reiterated assertions that the movement was controlled by a power-seeking faction that did not speak for the spectrum of political opposition to Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

"I don't believe I can contribute anything by staying for one minute more," Cruz said in Costa Rica, where he met with Alfonso Robelo and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the other directors of the contra umbrella group, United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO).

The resignation follows months of bitter public disputes that underscored deep political differences within the movement.

Cruz, 62, had fought to win civilian control over activities of the contras' main army, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN).

The FDN is headed by Adolfo Calero, a staunch rightist who recently resigned from the UNO directorate, but who retained control of the largest rebel army.

Since last May, Cruz had repeatedly threatened to leave the UNO because of his failure to obtain civilian control of contra military operations. He had also pushed for a negotiated

solution to the conflict, while Calero has said that the Nicaraguan government must be overthrown militarily.

The UNO was set up in 1985 at the suggestion of the Reagan administration to improve the image of the CIA-trained rebels, whose military leadership is dominated by former members of the National Guard of the late dictator Anastasio Somoza.

But the oft-threatened resignation, when it finally came, still surprised even Cruz's closest supporters.

U.S. officials apparently had no notice of Cruz's decision, which raised serious doubts about the future of the contras and the Reagan administration's support for them.

The resignation came a day before Congress was to begin debating the release of \$40 million to the contras, the last installment in a \$100 million aid package approved last year.

Cruz's participation in the contra movement was considered crucial to congressional passage of renewed aid last year. He was expected to play an important role in securing a new \$105 million contra-funding request by the Reagan administration.

The White House played down the resignation, however, apparently in an effort to dispel statements that Cruz's leaving was a serious blow to the movement.

"Cruz's presence was temporary," said a White House official, calling the resignation part of a continuing reform of the movement. "We expect that it will result in a larger and more representative directorate in the next few weeks."

Cruz's wife, Consuelo, delivered the statement Monday morning to a member of the Miami Herald editorial board.

"I personally did not expect this at all," said UNO secretary-general Leonardo Somarriba. "It caught us completely by surprise."

In his statement, Cruz warned against the "vicious circle of a past in which those who, after helping liberate us from the Somoza dictatorship, made themselves dictators."

Cruz did not single out anyone by name.

Cruz once served the Sandinistas as ambassador to the United States and is well regarded by a number of moderate members of Congress.

Some rebel officials said Cruz's action represented a major blow to the

Reagan administration's efforts to improve the image of the contras with Congress in line with a formula put forward and endorsed by Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs.

The project was aimed at diluting and displacing the influence of the FDN and replacing it with a unified movement under Cruz and Robelo.

That project began to be implemented last month with Calero's resignation. Cruz said in his resignation statement that the movement's military chiefs must accept civilian leadership. "This is indispensable so that the free world sees the rebel forces as a liberation movement and not as a legion of conquerors," Cruz said.

A State Department official said, "We do not have a comment at this point because we still have not been able to confirm the information."

Meanwhile, in another setback for the contras, the Costa Rican government announced that the rebels would no longer be allowed to use the country as a public meeting place.

The ban on all gatherings of the contras was announced in a presidential communique issued late yesterday.

Rebel leaders "will be instructed not to hold any meetings in Costa Rica, on the understanding that if they fail to comply with this order their political asylum will be suspended and they will have to abandon the national territory immediately," the communique said.

To avoid being expelled from Costa Rica, rebel leaders in exile here must avoid taking part in any "political activities directly or indirectly linked to the armed struggle in Nicaragua," it said.

Costa Rica, which has no standing army, professes neutrality in all regional conflicts, including the war in neighboring Nicaragua.

President Oscar Arias, who took office 10 months ago, has explicitly prohibited the use of his country as a base for contra military activities.

Until now, however, the government had allowed the rebels to use Costa Rica for political and propaganda activities.

Under the decree announced yesterday, the UNO will be forced to find a new location for its monthly assemblies.

Reuters contributed to this article.